

**Statutory Interpretation, Law 6524 (2 credits)**  
**Fall 2025**  
**Syllabus v. 1.0 (7/16/2025)**

Professor Mark Fenster  
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Office: Holland Hall 371

**Class meetings:**

- T & Th, 9:00-9:55 HH 382

**Office hours:**

- T & Th 10-11 in person
- by appointment (in person or online, <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/3415941766>).

**Required Reading Materials**

- 1) ANTONIN SCALIA & BRYAN A. GARNER, *READING LAW: THE INTERPRETATION OF LEGAL TEXTS* (Thompson/ West, 2012).
- 2) Course handouts, available at the course's Canvas site.

**Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes:** The law is increasingly defined by legislative enactments. Legislators, legislative staff, and lobbyists spend much of their time struggling to negotiate and draft statutes, which judges, administrators, and attorneys then spend a significant amount of time attempting to interpret. This course focuses on how and why legislation is enacted and on statutory interpretation by courts and executive branches. The course materials include statutes, appellate decisions, and commentary from the relevant legal and political science literature. Students will gain significant experience reading statutes closely. They will understand how and why statutes are imperfectly drafted and how they are interpreted by attorneys, administrators, legislators, and judges, and they will learn how to formulate and develop arguments in support of or against particular language and interpretations.

At the conclusion of this course, students who complete the assignments and attend class can expect to have acquired the following knowledge and skills related to statutory interpretation.

**Knowledges:** The legislative process, legislation's role in our legal system, and statutory interpretation

- Students identify and describe the legislative process in a constitutional, bicameral system, as well as the text and components of bills and the resulting statutes, and how the process creates "legislative history" that is available from various different sources.
- Students identify and describe the processes of editing, negotiating, and drafting statutes.
- Students identify and describe the basic theories and schools of textual interpretation and the interpretive tools they bring to bear on statutory text, as well as the bases of their disagreement, and learn to apply and critique them.
- Students identify and describe the most prominent interpretive canons and how they both resolve and create textual ambiguity.
- Students identify and describe how and why administrative agencies interpret statutes, and how and why courts defer to administrative agencies (or refuse to do so) when the latter interpret statutes.

**Skills:** Legislative drafting and statutory interpretation

- The single most important skill the course teaches is the close reading of statutory language in isolation and context.
- Students will also learn the basic concepts and processes of drafting statutory language.
- Students identify the structure of statutory texts and the relationship between one provision and the entirety of a statute.
- Students develop the skill to apply different interpretive approaches to assist and advocate on behalf of a client.
- Students learn and assess the context in which statutory interpretation occurs—from legislatures in drafting a statute, to administrative agencies and courts (and often both) attempting to enforce it, to private parties attempting to comply with them.
- Students employ these basic skills through problems and cases that range across substantive subject areas, including criminal law, tax, family law, administrative law, and the like.

**Office Hours:** My office hours are listed above. I am teaching two courses this semester and will share my office hours with both sets of students. Normally, I will invite multiple students from the same course to share their time to facilitate discussion and use our time more efficiently. I will hold individual appointments outside of office hours in-person or remote by agreement.

**In Person/ Zoom:** Although most class periods this semester will be in-person, I will occasionally hold classes on Zoom, especially when we have visiting speakers. I have not yet decided how I will decide which class will be held in each modality, but I will endeavor to make that decision at least a week in advance. Certain extenuating circumstances about the progress of infection on campus, in the city, and among us may well force us to retreat to Zoom. *Note: Unless you receive permission from me prior to class, I will expect that you will leave your camera on if you are joining the class via Zoom, and I will mark absent those who fail to do so.*

**Common Courtesy (late arrivals, getting up during class):** Please do not arrive late to class or leave class early absent extenuating circumstances. Please be certain to obtain essential items or relieve yourself before class begins. If you think you will need to get up on a regular basis during class, *including because you anticipate that you will need to go to the bathroom*, please choose a seat near one of the exits. I reserve the right to deduct points from your final grade if you engage in behavior that significantly disrupts the learning environment for your classmates. I also reserve the right to lock the doors at the beginning of class and to remove anyone from class who is being disruptive.

**Class Preparation and ABA Out-of-Class Hours Requirements:** You should arrive in class having read the materials closely. You should expect to spend, on average, approximately two hours preparing for every hour of class; therefore, expect to spend four hours each week to prepare for class. Reading assignments are posted below and I will announce specific class assignments in class and posted on the Canvas page. You should expect to have about 50 pages of reading each week.

**Attendance/ Participation:** Attendance is required, as per the requirements of both the ABA and the Law School. Each day, I will have at the front of the classroom an attendance chart for you to initial before class begins and will employ a similar system for classes held remotely.

- **If you are “prepared,” I can cold-call on you.** Before I may not review the attendance chart before class, feel free (and without shame) to respond to a cold-call by saying that you did not sign in that day.
- To be “prepared” you must have read the assignment and have made a good faith effort to think through the materials so that I may cold-call on you. You do not have to have perfect answers to the questions we might pose, but you must be willing to discuss the assigned reading (and prior readings) and work through the questions with the class. If I call on you and I believe you are not prepared even though you have signed in as prepared, I reserve the right to lower your final

grade. Also, I will consider it a violation of the honor code if you have someone else sign you in and you are not present, and I reserve the right to dock your final grade.

- If you are not “present and prepared” for 4 or more of our regularly scheduled classes, your grade for the semester will be adversely affected. If you are absent for 7 or more regularly scheduled classes, I will administratively drop you from the course, no matter your excuse. Conversely, I reserve the right to increase your final grade for superior classroom participation, both when I call on you and for voluntary participation.
- *You may not sign in as present and prepared if you arrive late for class or if you forget to sign in before class.*
- If you have a medical reason for missing class, you must contact me ASAP before or soon after class and provide documentation for your absence to be excused. To be excused from class for religious holidays, students must contact me beforehand by e-mail.

**Seating:** I will circulate a seating chart at the beginning of the first class. You must occupy the same seat each day. It will help me learn your names—a skill with which I was not born, sadly—and provide some order to the class sessions.

**Evaluation, Class Participation:** There will be a three-hour final exam for this course that is scheduled (as of the date of this syllabus), on [TBD by administration]. It will be an in-class, open-book exam for which you will *not* have access to the internet. The exam will be administered via the online exam-taking platform that the law school utilizes. The exam will be worth 100% of your grade and evaluated anonymously, though your final grade can be affected by in-class participation.

During the first two days of class, I will cold call on any student in the class. You may pass, but you will be marked absent and I will call on you first the next day of class. After the first week of class, I will divide the class into two sections, one of which will be on-call Tuesday and the other on Thursday. I will expect that those on call will engage in serious preparation and have a thoroughgoing knowledge of the facts, statutes, result, and reasoning in the case they have been assigned. I reserve the right to change this approach to cold-calling as circumstances develop over the course of the term.

**Use of Computers in Class:** I expect and encourage the use of computers in class for activities related to class, including taking notes and referring to readings from Canvas. I will not, however, tolerate the use of computers for activities unrelated to the class (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging, web surfing, game playing, shopping). I reserve the right to call on people whom I sense are engaging in unauthorized computer use during class, and to lower their final grades, *even if they have not signed in as present and prepared.*

### **Class Cancellation Policy**

I may have to cancel class during the term. If I do, I will plan make-up classes later in the semester that will likely be held on Zoom. I will not take attendance for make-up classes and will make certain they are recorded.

### **UF Levin College of Law Standard Syllabus Policies**

Other information about UF Levin College of Law policies, including compliance with the UF Honor Code, Grading, Accommodations, Class Recordings, and Course Evaluations can be found at [this link](#).

## Reading Assignments

*All readings besides those from READING LAW are available via course Canvas page. Although this schedule appears nearly complete and fixed, we may have to shift dates to accommodate guest speakers.*

- Tuesday 8/19: Introduction to the class
  - Readings:
    - syllabus;
    - *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 140 S.Ct. 1731 (2020)
    - *Stanley v. City of Sanford, Florida*, 606 U.S. ---- (2025) (excerpt)
  - View: Canvas video called “Class Intro” (discusses main themes and syllabus).
- Thursday, 8/21: Introduction to the Legislative Process: Most of this day's materials will be delivered by lecture and video, but **we will meet by Zoom for 40 minutes during class time**, during which we will discuss a legislative process problem (available from Canvas).
  - View:
    - The first three videos in the Khan Academy series “[Structures, Powers, and Functions of Congress](#)”: “How a Bill Becomes Law,” “The House of Representatives in Comparison to the Senate,” and “Senate Filibusters, Unanimous Consent, and Cloture.”
    - The final two videos in Congress’s series “[The Legislative Process](#)”: “Resolving Differences” and “Presidential Actions.”
    - Lectures on Canvas: “The Legislative Process” and “Theories of Legislation” (note: slides are available via Canvas).
  - For deeper knowledge, you could also skim “[How Our Laws Are Made: Learn About the Legislative Process](#),” congress.gov.
- Tuesday, 8/26: Visit of legislator
  - TBD
- Thursday, 8/28: Textualism
  - READING LAW, pp. 1-46;
  - *United States v. James*, 478 U.S. 597 (1986) (Canvas).
- Tuesday, 9/2: Purposivism
  - *Bob Jones University v. U.S.*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983)
  - *Holy Trinity Church v. U.S.*, 143 U.S. 457 (1892)
- Thursday, 9/4: Pragmatism and Consequentialism
  - *U.S. v. Marshall*, 908 F.2d 1312 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1990)
  - *Hively v. Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana*, 853 F.3d 339 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2017) (Posner, J. concurring)
  - Anita S. Krishnakumar, *Practical Consequences in Statutory Interpretation*, 139 HARV. L. REV. \_\_\_\_ (forthcoming 2026), pp. 4-16.
  - READING LAW, pp. 352-354.
  - *Van Buren v. United States*, 593 U.S. 374 (2021) (edited)
- Tuesday, 9/9: Text v. Purpose:
  - READING LAW, pp. 93-100
  - *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Co.*, 74 N.Y.2d 201 (1989)
  - NJ Tax Trilogy:
    - *Mills v. East Windsor Tp.*, 176 N.J. Super. 271 (1980)
    - *MacMillan v. Division of Taxation I*, 180 N.J. Super. 175 (1981)
    - *MacMillan v. Division of Taxation II*, 89 N.J. 216 (1982)
- Thursday, 9/11: Interpretive Theories in Action (class held on Zoom)

- Lon L. Fuller, *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers in the Supreme Court of Newgarth*, 4300, 62 HARV. L. REV. 616 (1949)
- Tuesday, 9/16: Meaning of Statutory Terms
  - READING LAW, pp. 69-77.
  - *Commonwealth v. McCoy*, 962 A.2d 1160 (Pa. 2009)
  - The “use trilogy”: *Smith/ Bailey/ Watson*
- Thursday, 9/18: Applying Statutory Terms in New Contexts
  - *Patton v. Vanterpool*, 806 S.E.2d 493 (Ga. 2017)
  - *Sieglein v. Schmidt*, 136 A.3d 751 (Md. 2016)
- Tuesday, 9/23: When the Statute Defines a Term
  - READING LAW, pp. 225-233.
  - *Harris v. State*, 686 S.E.2d 777 (Ga. 2009)
  - *Babbitt v. Sweet Home Chapter of Communities for a Great Oregon*, 515 U.S. 687 (1995)
- Thursday, 9/25: When the Statute Creates Distinct Categories
  - *Nix v. Hedden*, 149 U.S. 304 (1893)
  - *Toy Biz*. (U.S. Ct. Int’l. Trade 2003)
  - *Knox v. Massachusetts Soc. for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, 425 N.E.2d 393 (Mass. App. Ct. 1981)
- Tuesday, 9/30: When Other Language or Statutes Are Relevant to Meaning
  - READING LAW, pp. 167-69, 252-255
  - *Rhyne v. K-Mart Corp*, 594 S.E.2d 1 (N.C. 2004)
  - *In re HC*, 176 N.H. 248 (2023)
  - *Montgomery County Volunteer Fire-Rescue Ass’n v. Montgomery County Bd. Elections*, 15 A.3d 798 (Md. 2011)
- Thursday, 10/2: Making Sense of Lists (*ejusdem generis* and *noscitur a sociis*)
  - READING LAW, pp. 195-213
  - *People v. Vasquez*, 631 N.W.2d 711 (Mich. 2011)
  - *Ali v. Federal Bureau of Prisons*, 552 U.S. 214 (2008)
- Tuesday, 10/7: When a Statute Speaks Once or Twice (*expressio unius* and the rule against surplusage)
  - READING LAW, pp. 107-111, 174-179
  - *Feld v. Robert & Charles Beauty Salon*, 459 N.W.2d 279 (Mich. 1990)
  - *PW Ventures v. Nichols*, 533 So. 2d 281 (Fla. 1988)
- Thursday, 10/9: Adjectives and the Order of Words (the serial modifier and last antecedent canons)
  - READING LAW, pp. 144-151
  - *Lockhart v. United States*, 577 US 347 (2016)
  - *United States v. Hayes*, 555 U.S. 415 (2009)
- Tuesday, 10/14: Constitutional Avoidance
  - READING LAW, pp. 247-251
  - *Bond v. United States*, 572 U.S. 844 (2014)
- Thursday, 10/16: Incoherence and Fairness (the rule against absurdity and the rule of lenity)
  - READING LAW, pp. 234-239, 296-302
  - *Muscarello v. United States*, 524 U.S. 125 (1998)
  - *U.S. v. Fontaine*, 697 F.3d 221 (3rd Cir. 2012)
  - *Maddox v. State*, 923 So.2d 442 (Fla. 2006)
- Tuesday, 10/21: The Roles of Precedent and Congressional Inaction
  - READING LAW, pp. 411-414
  - *Flood v. Kuhn*, 407 U.S. 258 (1972)
  - *Allied-Bruce Terminix Companies v. Dobson*, 513 U.S. 265 (1995)

- Thursday, 10/23: Playing with Textualism
  - *Yates v. United States*, 574 U.S. 528 (2015)
- Tuesday, 10/28: Legislative History and Statutory History
  - READING LAW, pp. 369-390
  - *Wooden v. United States*, 142 S.Ct. 1063 (2022)
  - *In re Crocker*, 941 F.3d 206 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2019)
- Thursday, 10/30: Judicial Review of Administrative Agency Interpretations (1)
  - Merrill, “The Demise of Deference,” Introduction & Part I
  - *Loper Bright v. Raimondo*, 144 S. Ct. 2244 (2024)
- Tuesday, 11/4: Judicial Review of Administrative Agency Interpretations (2)
  - Merrill, “The Demise of Deference,” Part IV & Conclusion (Canvas)
  - *Skidmore v. Swift & Co.*, 323 U.S. 134 (1944)
  - *Mayfield v. Dep’t of Labor*, 117 F.4<sup>th</sup> 611 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2024) [skip Part II-B for now]
  - *United Natural Foods, Incorporated v. National Labor Relations Board*, 138 F.4<sup>th</sup> 937 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2025)
- Thursday, 11/6: The “Major Questions” Doctrine
  - *Food and Drug Admin. v. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp.*, 529 U.S. 120 (2000)
  - Congressional Research Service, “The Major Questions Doctrine”
  - *West Virginia v. EPA*, 597 U.S. 697 (2022)
  - *Mayfield v. Dep’t of Labor*, 117 F.4<sup>th</sup> 611 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2024) [review facts, read only Part II-B]
- Thursday, 11/13: Final cases (1)
  - *Fischer v. U.S.*, 144 S.Ct. 2176 (2024)
  - *Niz-Chavez v. Garland*, 593 U.S. 155 (2021)
- Thursday, 11/18: Exam discussion and review problem.
  - Problem (to be posted on Canvas)